

Lesson Unit 11: Knowledge

Learning Outcomes:

At the completion of the lesson, students will be able to

- Explain in what sense the Buddha is a knower.
- Explain Buddhist path to knowledge as consists of both perception and inference.
- Explain six types of extra-sensory knowledge
- Explain threefold extra sensory knowledge
- Explain how Siddhartha attained enlightenment
-

Student Activities:

- Read each of the Readings/notes carefully and underline/ highlight the key words and concepts.
- Also go through the slides of the PowerPoint presentation.
- Draw a mind-map around the main topic linking the key words and concepts that you have underlined or highlighted in the readings/notes showing their relationship to the main topic and also to each other
- Read the quoted passages and be familiar with the textual explanations on knowledge
- For your journal entries, write detailed accounts on the following: Buddha as knower, perception, inference, extra-sensory knowledge, pubbenivasanussati, dibbacakkhu, asavakkhaya

1. Reading

The Highest Knowledge: An Early Buddhist Perspective

Siddhartha Gotama left the world in search of the good and the supreme foundation for peace. His vision was that for peace to be attained one must attain supreme knowledge and full enlightenment (M I 431). Later he became one with supreme knowledge and insight (M I 167). On the day of his enlightenment, he attained the threefold higher knowledge in the three successive watches of the night (M I 248-9). He claimed himself to be fully enlightened only when he had a direct knowledge and insight into things as they are (S III 29). He became a knower (A IV 340), one with spiritual knowledge; one with perfected wisdom (Sn 463); one with right knowledge (A II 89); a speaker of right knowledge (D III 12); one who knowing knows and seeing sees having become sight and knowledge (M I 111); one who knows the things as they really have been. Having himself first realized the highest wisdom he started teaching it to others (D I 12). His instruction was that the doubtful person should train himself in the path of knowledge (Sn 868).

The Buddhist path of knowledge consists of perception and inference. The former is divided into sensory knowledge and extra-sensory knowledge. The latter is based on the

former.

The extra-sensory knowledge is classified again into six types. They are presented as those that could be attained by any disciple who fulfills the conditions of reaching the level of concentration known as the fourth form absorption. The Buddha himself attained them and so did his predecessor Buddhas. The disciples who attained them were reckoned as six-knowledge-arahants. The six are as follows:

- (1) psycho kinesis (iddhividha)
- (2) clairaudience (dibbasota)
- (3) telepathy (cetopariyanana)
- (4) retro-cognition (pubbenivasanussati)
- (5) clairvoyance (dibbacakkhu)
- (6) knowledge in the destruction of all defilements (asavakkhaya).

Of these the first five are considered worldly knowledge. Of them the first three are considered low because of the possibility of misuse by the worldly persons for worldly gains. So the Buddha encouraged not his disciples to practice them. The first of these three is not really a kind of knowledge but a type of supernormal power, ability, and skill. It enables one to act as she wills. The second, clairaudience, enables one to hear sounds near and far, human and divine. The third, telepathic knowledge enables one to read others' mind as one sees one's face in a mirror (D I 80).

The last two of the first five are considered useful for the attainment of the Buddhist goal. The fourth, the retro-cognitive knowledge, enables one to reminisce one's past and the fifth, clairvoyance, enables one to see how beings cease and arise conditioned by their own intentional actions (D I 82-3). Both types are direct experience. One with retro-cognition recollects his/her former lives just like a man who returns from a trip could remember all about it. Though one could remember the flow of one's own stream of consciousness she cannot do so in the case of another's. Hence, the clairvoyance helps one perceive the continuity of others' lives. However, this observation is possible only at the time of their occurrence; that is, with this knowledge one directly sees the birth and death of beings at the time of their occurrence. The knowledge is compared to a man with eye-sight who stationing himself on the terrace of a palace situated on the cross-roads sees people sitting or loitering about, coming or going from one direction to another.

The sixth extra-sensory knowledge is that of the ceasing of the defiling tendencies (D I 82-3). This is what is called wisdom (panna) in Buddhism. It is the highest form of knowledge in which one's sensory perception becomes clear, flexible, and open. This knowledge gives one actual peace and happiness, and makes one morally perfect. Buddhism talks about two extra ordinary eyes: the divine eye and the eye of wisdom. The eye of wisdom is the knowledge of the destruction of defilements. With this eye, one becomes pure and knows oneself to be pure (Sn 184). With this eye, one directly sees the reality (Dhp 277-9). One with this perception is compared to a man of clear vision who standing at the bank of a clear, transparent, and tranquil pool of water on the hilltop sees shells, conches, and swimming fish in the water. The Buddha teaches about the destruction of cankers after knowing and seeing things with this eye (S II 29).

The texts frequently use the word seeing along with knowing: “I know and see it” (M I 329). The Buddha is “one who knows and sees” (M II 111). His teachings are to be known and seen: “Having comprehended one sees the noble truths” (Sn 40, Dhp 190). “One actualizes the final truth and sees it directly through wisdom” (M II 112). Nibbana is to be seen (M I 511). It is to be seen like a man who, though born blind, has been treated and completely cured by the physician. It is the highest knowledge (AN V 37). It enables one to penetrate into all things.

This knowledge attained through direct vision is the objective knowledge for it is not dependent on or determined by the subjective mode of perception. It differs not from person to person, and is not a private possession of the Buddha or any his disciples. It is accessible to others and open to all. The dhamma (reality) remains the same whether the Tathagata teaches it or not (M I 331).

Why one should lead a lead a holy life under the Buddha? It is for the attainment of this knowledge and insight; for knowing, seeing, realizing and comprehending of what is not known, not seen, not realized and not comprehended (A IV 285). However, for its attainment, it requires certain moral discipline and practice of concentration. The knowledge arises in a state when the mind is purged of all impurities and defilements. When one has gone a long way in the practice of concentration, knowledge and vision arises (M I 200). When one has right knowledge, he then experiences peace and freedom in all of his dealings (M III 76). It is by following such a progressive path one attains this capacity to know and see, directly and personally. Whoever fulfills the condition can realize it. It is the path that the Buddha and those others traversed in the past (S II 176). The Buddha claims only to have seen and discovered the truth and the way to it. Truth is objectively there and is open to all (S V 168). It is not a private or subjective experience of the Buddha. It is knowledge and insight of the object as it is. This knowledge corresponds to the facts (S II 30). With it one knows what exists as exists and what does not exist as does not exist (A V 36). When one has this knowledge he joins with those who have right knowledge (S II 169).

2. Reading

Siddhartha's Enlightenment Experience

Siddhartha learned from Alara Kalam and Uddaka Ramaputta how to appease the mind. Through his dedicated exercise, he moved on to a stage beyond what he had experienced earlier. He attained the state of cessation, a state in which all perceptions and what had been experienced came to an end.

Siddhartha through his ability to stop all perceptions and experience realized the non-cognitive nature of that state. Therefore, he emerged from that state and devoted most of his time to a cognitive understanding of existence.

The process of meditation that led to the cessation of perception also involved excessive concentration and flexibility of mind. Equipped with these he spent much time reflecting on his own past (retro-cognition or *pubbenivasanussati*). Looking at the information provided by such reflection, without adopting too many presuppositions, such as the existence of a permanent and eternal substance, Siddhartha understood how his life had been conditioned by various factors.

Developing the cognitive capacity called clairvoyance (*dibbacakkhu*), he perceived how the lives of other human beings are conditioned in the same way. He realized that, in addition to factors such as one's parents and environment, one's own behavior (*kamma*) contributes to the manner in which human life evolves. He wanted an explanation. This involved him in a massive psychological enterprise.

Even though he understood that human life is often conditioned by factors for which one is not fully responsible, examining the psychological springs of human behavior, he came to realize that there is a ray of hope for freedom. It was this realization that prompted him to analyze the psychological springs of action, or motivation, and distinguish behavior on the basis of its intentionality or non-intentionality. The rest of his investigations thus focused on discovering the motives that dominate human action and lead to unfortunate and evil consequences.

Greed and hatred headed the list. The difficulty lay in eliminating such negative moves without adopting a totally negative attitude toward human emotions. Siddhartha wanted to discard passion and be dispassionate without simultaneously losing the capacity for compassion. The method he finally adopted was to appease his dispositional tendencies without either allowing them to grow into states of greed, lust, or attachment or actually annihilating them, which was tantamount to suicide.

This psychological struggle continued until he emerged from it claiming that he had appeased or calmed his dispositions (*sabbasankharasamatha*) and attained the cessation of lust and hatred. The elimination of lust and hatred and appeasement of the dispositions enabled him to adopt a restrained attitude about the view he had adopted of the world. Without looking for any form of absolute or permanent existence, or of nihilistic non-existence, he examined the nature of human conception.

Appeasement of the dispositions enabled him to look at conception itself as possessing pragmatic value rather than absolutistic implications. This eliminated the last of the hurdles or obstacles, namely confusion (*moha*).

The elimination of lust, hatred, and confusion constituted his enlightenment and freedom, and this final knowledge and insight is referred to as Knowledge of the waning of influxes. It represents a transformation of his whole personality, cognitive, conative, and

emotive. With that transformation, Siddhartha was able to perceive the world paying attention to the human predicament and the way out of it, which he summarized in the four noble truths.

3. Readings from sources

Insight Knowledge

"With his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to knowledge and vision. He discerns: 'This body of mine is endowed with form, composed of the four primary elements, born from mother and father, nourished with rice and porridge, subject to inconstancy, rubbing, pressing, dissolution, and dispersion. And this consciousness of mine is supported here and bound up here.' Just as if there were a beautiful beryl gem of the purest water — eight faceted, well polished, clear, limpid, consummate in all its aspects, and going through the middle of it was a blue, yellow, red, white, or brown thread — and a man with good eyesight, taking it in his hand, were to reflect on it thus: 'This is a beautiful beryl gem of the purest water, eight faceted, well polished, clear, limpid, consummate in all its aspects. And this, going through the middle of it, is a blue, yellow, red, white, or brown thread.' In the same way — with his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability — the monk directs and inclines it to knowledge and vision. He discerns: 'This body of mine is endowed with form, composed of the four primary elements, born from mother and father, nourished with rice and porridge, subject to inconstancy, rubbing, pressing, dissolution, and dispersion. And this consciousness of mine is supported here and bound up here.'

"This, too, is called the miracle of instruction.

The Mind-made Body

"With his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to creating a mind-made body. From this body he creates another body, endowed with form, made of the mind, complete in all its parts, not inferior in its faculties. Just as if a man were to draw a reed from its sheath. The thought would occur to him: 'This is the sheath, this is the reed. The sheath is one thing, the reed another, but the reed has been drawn out from the sheath.' Or as if a man were to draw a sword from its scabbard. The thought would occur to him: 'This is the sword, this is the scabbard. The sword is one thing, the scabbard another, but the sword has been drawn out from the scabbard.' Or as if a man were to pull a snake out from its slough. The thought would occur to him: 'This is the snake, this is the slough. The snake is one thing, the slough another, but the snake has

been pulled out from the slough.' In the same way — with his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability, the monk directs and inclines it to creating a mind-made body. From this body he creates another body, endowed with form, made of the mind, complete in all its parts, not inferior in its faculties.

"This, too, is called the miracle of instruction.

Supranormal Powers

"With his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to the modes of supranormal powers. He wields manifold supranormal powers. Having been one he becomes many; having been many he becomes one. He appears. He vanishes. He goes unimpeded through walls, ramparts, and mountains as if through space. He dives in and out of the earth as if it were water. He walks on water without sinking as if it were dry land. Sitting cross-legged he flies through the air like a winged bird. With his hand he touches and strokes even the sun and moon, so mighty and powerful. He exercises influence with his body even as far as the Brahma worlds. Just as a skilled potter or his assistant could craft from well-prepared clay whatever kind of pottery vessel he likes, or as a skilled ivory-carver or his assistant could craft from well-prepared ivory any kind of ivory-work he likes, or as a skilled goldsmith or his assistant could craft from well-prepared gold any kind of gold article he likes; in the same way — with his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability — the monk directs and inclines it to the modes of supranormal powers... He exercises influence with his body even as far as the Brahma worlds.

"This, too, is called the miracle of instruction.

Clairaudience

"With his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to the divine ear-element. He hears — by means of the divine ear-element, purified and surpassing the human — both kinds of sounds: divine and human, whether near or far. Just as if a man traveling along a highway were to hear the sounds of kettledrums, small drums, conchs, cymbals, and tom-toms. He would know, 'That is the sound of kettledrums, that is the sound of small drums, that is the sound of conchs, that is the sound of cymbals, and that is the sound of tom-toms.' In the same way — with his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability — the monk directs and inclines it to the divine ear-element. He hears — by means of the divine ear-element, purified and surpassing the human — both kinds of sounds: divine and human, whether near or far.

"This, too, is called the miracle of instruction.

Mind Reading

"With his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to knowledge of the awareness of other beings. He knows the awareness of other beings, other individuals, having encompassed it with his own awareness. He discerns a mind with passion as a mind with passion, and a mind without passion as a mind without passion. He discerns a mind with aversion as a mind with aversion, and a mind without aversion as a mind without aversion. He discerns a mind with delusion as a mind with delusion, and a mind without delusion as a mind without delusion. He discerns a restricted mind as a restricted mind, and a scattered mind as a scattered mind. He discerns an enlarged mind as an enlarged mind, and an unenlarged mind as an unenlarged mind. He discerns an excelled mind [one that is not at the most excellent level] as an excelled mind, and an unexcelled mind as an unexcelled mind. He discerns a concentrated mind as a concentrated mind, and an unconcentrated mind as an unconcentrated mind. He discerns a released mind as a released mind, and an unreleased mind as an unreleased mind. Just as if a young woman — or man — fond of ornaments, examining the reflection of her own face in a bright mirror or a bowl of clear water would know 'blemished' if it were blemished, or 'unblemished' if it were not. In the same way — with his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability — the monk directs and inclines it to knowledge of the awareness of other beings. He knows the awareness of other beings, other individuals, having encompassed it with his own awareness. He discerns a mind with passion as a mind with passion, and a mind without passion as a mind without passion... a released mind as a released mind, and an unreleased mind as an unreleased mind.

"This, too, is called the miracle of instruction.

Recollection of Past Lives

"With his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to knowledge of the recollection of past lives (lit: previous homes). He recollects his manifold past lives, i.e., one birth, two births, three births, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, one hundred, one thousand, one hundred thousand, many aeons of cosmic contraction, many aeons of cosmic expansion, many aeons of cosmic contraction and expansion, [recollecting], 'There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose there. There too I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose here.' Thus he recollects his manifold past lives in their modes and details. Just as if a man were to go from his home village to another village, and then from that village to yet

another village, and then from that village back to his home village. The thought would occur to him, 'I went from my home village to that village over there. There I stood in such a way, sat in such a way, talked in such a way, and remained silent in such a way. From that village I went to that village over there, and there I stood in such a way, sat in such a way, talked in such a way, and remained silent in such a way. From that village I came back home.' In the same way — with his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability — the monk directs and inclines it to knowledge of the recollection of past lives. He recollects his manifold past lives... in their modes and details.

"This, too, is called the miracle of instruction.

The Passing Away & Re-appearance of Beings

"With his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to knowledge of the passing away and re-appearance of beings. He sees — by means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human — beings passing away and re-appearing, and he discerns how they are inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate in accordance with their kamma: 'These beings — who were endowed with bad conduct of body, speech, and mind, who reviled the noble ones, held wrong views and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views — with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the plane of deprivation, the bad destination, the lower realms, in hell. But these beings — who were endowed with good conduct of body, speech, and mind, who did not revile the noble ones, who held right views and undertook actions under the influence of right views — with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the good destinations, in the heavenly world.' Thus — by means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human — he sees beings passing away and re-appearing, and he discerns how they are inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate in accordance with their kamma. Just as if there were a tall building in the central square [of a town], and a man with good eyesight standing on top of it were to see people entering a house, leaving it, walking along the street, and sitting in the central square. The thought would occur to him, 'These people are entering a house, leaving it, walking along the streets, and sitting in the central square.' In the same way — with his mind thus concentrated, purified, and bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, and attained to imperturbability — the monk directs and inclines it to knowledge of the passing away and re-appearance of beings. He sees — by means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human — beings passing away and re-appearing, and he discerns how they are inferior and superior, beautiful and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate in accordance with their kamma...

"This, too, is called the miracle of instruction.

4. Notes

Sense Experience (M I, 111-112)

1. Depending upon the visual sense and the visible object arises visual consciousness; the coming together of these three is contact; depending upon contact arises feeling.
2. What one feels one perceives; what one perceives one reasons about. What one reasons about, one is obsessed with.
3. Due to such obsession, a person is assailed by obsessed perceptions and concepts in regard to visible objects cognizable by the visual sense, belonging to the past, the future and the present.
 - The principle according to which sense experience begins to take place is “dependence” (paticcasamuppada). Thereby the conception of a self that functions as the agent is eliminated.
 - Visual organ is part of the physically identifiable personality which is itself part of the psychological personality (nama-rupa).
 - Under normal circumstances: sense experience ends with the generation of obsessions.
 - The obsessions are the results of rationalization about the objects cognizable by the senses and which belong to the past, present, and the future.
 - It is not the cognition itself that leads to the obsessions but reasoning about them.
 - Why should reasoning result in obsessions?
 - The language of part one (up to the occurrence of feeling) is in the passive voice. This mode of description is most appropriate for formulating the principle of dependence.
 - The language of part two, after the description of feeling, is in the active voice. It indicates the subtle change taking place in the process of perception.
 - Feeling serves as a dividing line between the natural process of perception and the one colored by the conception of an ego.
 - “I think, therefore, I am” (manta asmi). This is the thought that the Buddha advised his disciples to renounce (Sn 916).

- Feeling can occur without a conception of I am. Feeling is not evil or inherently unsatisfactory. In feeling there is satisfaction; its evil consequences are its impermanence and change.
- Freedom from feeling is not its elimination. It is the abandoning of excessive desire and lust for feeling (S IV, 233).
- It is this egoless feeling that appears in its noblest and supreme form in compassion.
- Feeling dissociated from the conception of an ego is just a lifeless lump of experience functioning according to the principle of dependence.
- Feeling is dependent upon contact. Contact is the coming together of three factors: the sense organ, the object of sense, and consciousness (D III, 105). Feeling will be determined by these three initial factors.
- When the stream of consciousness is stirred up by its dependence on the sense organ and the object, and when the object appears on a horizon, consciousness can be stretched to its limits. This is avoided only by a process of selecting and choosing, which consciousness resorts to at this point.
- The selecting and choosing takes place in terms of interest (sankhara). Such simple interest determines the very character of consciousness (S II, 28ff).
- Consciousness and interest when function together is called becoming (bhava) (A II, 79). Together they provide for a conception of an empirical self compared to the metaphysical conception of self or the belief in an ego that emerges with feeling.
- Enlightenment and freedom do not represent the elimination of the process of sense experience. Sense perception leads to obsession. What is necessary is to transform the process of sense perception. In fact, freedom is defined as appeasement of obsessions (A II, 162), absence of obsessions (nippapañca) (M I, 65), and appeasement of dispositions (S I, 158, 200; II, 192; IV, 216).
- Such appeasement is the result of the total renunciation of the metaphysical conception of a permanent and eternal self, a conception that comes to play at the time when feeling occurs.
- Enlightened Person's sense experience: sense organ, sense object, consciousness > contact > feeling > perception > reflection (no obsession).
- Perception is "putting together and knowing". Conception is "putting together and speaking".

- The truth (meaningfulness) and the falsity (meaninglessness) of a percept are determined on the basis of its function or consequence.
- Both singular (dhammo) and plural (dhammā) of dhamma is used to refer to both fact and value.
- The plural form of dhamma expresses the idea of dependently arisen phenomena (paticcasamuppanne dhamme) (S II, 25). Both the physical and psychological facts are included in it.
- The principle derived from the observation of the functioning of these facts is dependent arising, and it is referred to in the singular form dhammo (M I, 167)
- Virtues that a person cultivates as he or she progresses toward the final goal of freedom while living in the world of dependently arisen phenomena are referred to in the plural form of dhamma.
- The functioning of virtues (moral principle) is described in the singular form of dhammo (S I, 86, Dhp 151,168-169, 393)
- Facts could not be divorced from human knowledge and understanding; hence they are partly subjective. Values affect the facts themselves; hence are objective in a pragmatic sense.